forget that the high esteem America holds for its Army today has been purchased by the efforts, dedication, and, indeed, the blood of our soldiers. We have a sacred obligation to the soldiers of the future and to the soldiers of the past — to all the Task Force Smiths that have gone before and to all the soldiers who have laid down their lives never to permit our Army to be anything but trained and ready, and our soldiers to be led by anyone other than dedicated professionals who are competent, responsible, and committed. In this task, we cannot fail, must not fail, and will not fail.

One Place, Three Wars: Part 1

MAJOR GENERAL BERNARD LOEFFKE

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first of a two-part series. Part 2 will appear in our July-August 1991 issue.

To understand the United States' involvement in Vietnam is also to understand why we react as we do during crises. Our generals today were lieutenants, captains, majors, and lieutenant colonels during that war, which took more than 50,000 U.S. lives and lasted more than 10 years. As a result, most of us who are generals now, when we have to make decisions, refer consciously or subconsciously to our experience in that war. (Reading history, hearing lectures, and participating in maneuvers also assist us in preparing for combat, but nothing influences our decisions as much as our combat experiences do.)

Those of us who chose the profession of arms in the 1950s have spent the better part of our lives either preparing to fight or actually fighting communists or those supported by communists. For many of us that experience has been painful, to some final, but for most the exposure to actually fighting a committed opponent has been personally disquieting.

Let me explain. Although my experience at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point gave me an education, it left me unprepared for my first encounter with a communist. I had studied history but not how to be convincing in an argument with an educated communist. Today, because much of communism has been discredited by those who have tried to live under such a system, it is easier to defeat a communist verbally. But the dream of a more equitable society continues in the hearts and minds of many. In 1990, Latin American rebel leaders were saying, "Communism may not have worked in the Soviet Union, but we'll make it work here." These same rebels were saying that capitalism may work in the United States, but it doesn't work in Latin America.

Throughout history, man, in his attempt to create a fairer society that would ensure happiness for all, has experimented with different social systems. Greek philosophers wrote about the fair distribution of wealth, a theme also discussed in the Bible. Dissatisfaction with present systems will continue and will create friction. Peace is not at hand. Soldiers are still needed. But are the lessons we learned in Vietnam applicable today? Some are.

What follows is one soldier's attempt to document the lessons learned in his military career in the hope that the mistakes of recent history will not be repeated. My three "wars" in Vietnam provided very different experiences.

My initial involvement was part of an attempt to limit communism by using small groups of Special Forces soldiers. To keep our presence small, we sent volunteers to work with indigenous personnel. We trained them, helped them with equipment we gave them, called in air support, and, when needed, assisted in combat operations. This was my first war.

As the adversary raised his level of violence, we began to introduce advisors into the regular units of our allies, which gave us first-hand exposure to the techniques of employing large units in combat. Unfortunately, most of our advisors in this, my second war, served for only one year. After the year's tour, another American would arrive, forcing the Vietnamese to begin the education of their advisor for the third, fourth, fifth, or sixth time. (The Vietnamese had a favorite saying: "Americans have been here one year 20 times.")

In a war, there is no substitute for personal experience in making the would-be warrior wise. Therefore, the lessons I learned from my Vietnamese colleagues in the first two wars did prepare me to fight my third Vietnam war with U.S. troops.

I began learning to be a warrior at West Point in 1953. (Education, it has been said, is what remains when you can no longer remember the facts.) Along with the concepts of duty, honor, and country, what remained from West Point for me were the following five lessons:

A warrior has to conquer fear. Boxing, a requirement for all cadets, was for me the most demanding physical experience at the military academy. I had never been inside a ring, and having to fight a determined opponent was a good lesson in courage and aggressiveness.

In my first fight I was knocked down several times. At the end of the fight, I commented that it was an unfair battle because my opponent was more experienced. My instructor said, "Mister, you didn't learn your lesson." When I asked what that lesson might be, he answered, "In combat you never get to choose your enemy."

That one phrase has made me push soldiers harder than they may have thought they could be pushed so that they would be better prepared than the enemy in combat.

Sports build a warrior spirit. On the wall of the gymnasium was the famous quote from Douglas MacArthur: "On the fields of friendly strife are sown the seeds that on other days on other fields will bear the fruits of victory." At West Point I learned how important it is to provide athletic opportunities to warriors. Competitive athletics and combative sports give soldiers confidence, stamina, and physical strength — qualities they need in combat.

A warrior must organize his thinking. The discipline at the military academy was not only physical, it was also mental. I was not one of the best mathematics students that West Point had ever seen. The hard sciences were difficult, but the mental discipline they created helped me develop logical thinking.

Every officer is a teacher. I learned at West Point the value of studying. We used to say that the academy had examiners instead of instructors — they tested us daily. In the Army we learn from manuals and then teach soldiers what we have learned. The principle of self-instruction prepared me to be an officer.

History teaches how to win wars. Reading history exposed us to what wins and what loses conflicts. We studied countless battles and the relevance of the nine principles of war to winning these conflicts. (From the nine principles I later developed ten maxims that I called the Ten Ds for fighting subversion. I used these rules as the commanding general of U.S. Army South to construct a strategy for defeating subversion.)

After graduating from the Academy, a number of us attended airborne school where we learned to conquer fear. Jumping out of an aircraft increases confidence and courage. Then came Ranger school, which taught us that with little food and only two or three hours of sleep we could do what seemed humanly impossible. These courses prepared us to survive in combat.

I then reported to the 82d Airborne Division, but that tour was short-lived. The Special Forces were looking for officers who could speak French; I volunteered and was accepted. Knowledge of languages would become important in my career. I was the first of my classmates to taste combat simply because I spoke French. Knowledge of Russian would later assign me to Moscow, and Chinese would make me the first foreigner to jump with the Chinese Communist troops.

THE FIRST WAR

Special Forces taught me and my colleagues how to be accepted in foreign lands. In trying to gain the confidence of strangers, three skills proved valuable:

First, healing is especially effective when dealing with primitive people; some of them treat healers like gods. One of our first activities was to set up a dispensary wherever we went and begin healing those whom we would have to advise or befriend. Soon we gained our hosts' confidence, and they in turn were willing to do what we asked of them.

Second, we learned to do magic tricks. One that amused our hosts night after night involved three sticks. One had a rattle in it, and the object of the game was to guess which one. We would pick one of the sticks that did not rattle, show it to everybody, and make it rattle. Unknown to those who were watching, the demonstrator had a rattle between his fingers, hidden from them. When he put the stick down on the table, he would move it around slowly so the audience could easily follow what they thought was the stick with the rattle. A volunteer chosen by the group would then try to choose correctly, which, of course, he never did. This went on night after night while the natives laughed and roared when their representative missed the stick with the rattle.

Third, some of us sang and played musical instruments. At night we would gather around and one of us would play tunes, usually on a harmonica. The natives would listen attentively. We would then make sounds that they could echo and soon we had a chorus.

Training our hosts to fight was not difficult; they were already warriors. What we needed was to teach them the techniques of using modern weapons. By befriending them with medicine, magic, and music, we were able, in a short time, to train a fair size force that knew the basics of shooting, moving, and communicating.

Out of this war I learned the importance of being accepted. As an old sergeant once said, "Soldiers won't care what you know until they know that you care."

I also learned from this experience that we should not volunteer to assist another nation if we are not serious about the durability of our offer. As a young lieutenant, I saw U.S. troops pulling out from a base camp that was about to be overrun because Americans were not to be captured. We boarded the aircraft under direct orders and left our friends to fend for themselves. We would repeat this same action 12 years later. These two episodes hardened my conviction that the United States should not commit itself to something it couldn't see through. Patience and

stick-to-itiveness will bring success, sooner or later.

I returned to Special Forces headquarters at Fort Bragg, and two events worth mentioning occurred during my tenure there.

I was assigned to a demolition team where we practiced parachuting from high altitudes with explosives. One day I didn't properly adjust my pack to my parachute harness, and when I opened my chute at the prescribed altitude the bag with the explosives was ripped from my harness and plummeted down some 500 feet. Fortunately, no damage was done to anything but my pride. This taught me the necessity of checking and double-checking equipment before operations.

The second event was acting as translator. Brigadier General Joseph Stilwell, who was then Chief of Staff of the XVIII Airborne Corps (a position I would assume some 20 years later), asked me to translate his remarks to a group of officers from the Brazilian War College. I had not looked at a Portuguese book or spoken the language since I left West Point. General Stilwell spoke for a long time, making it difficult for me to remember everything he said, and I know I left out several points. Then he ended his presentation with an anecdote I did not understand. I so informed the Brazilian officers with the request that they please laugh at the General's joke. The Brazilians roared and General Stilwell was satisfied that the talk had been that well received. I survived that experience and my promotion to captain was rescued. From this experience I learned the importance of interpreters as they can change what is said. Someone needs to check the interpreter.

Orders then came assigning me to Brazil, a welcome rest before going once again to war. I arrived at a time of turmoil. The military forces were about to oust a civilian-led government and begin a long stay in power. (As a reminder of these times I kept copies of censored newspapers in which most of the front pages were left blank because they did not meet with the censor's approval.)

My most memorable event there was leading a parachute jump into the middle of the Amazon jungle. In my desire to avoid falling into the river, which was full of alligators and man-eating fish, I opted for jumping into the trees. (As a result of that jump, I was affectionately called the American Tree Officer.)

I left this two-year assignment with a respect for triple-canopy jungle and for light, long-range communications and skilled navigators. Being lost in the Amazon is dangerous.

I also saw there the effects a sedentary life can have on an individual. Two tribes that were no more than 15 miles apart had stark differences in their physical make-up. The people who were hunters, who ate meat and spent a great deal of time hunting their prey, were strong, tall, and healthy. Those who had become farmers were smaller, not as healthy, and not as strong. This contrast emphasized that warriors are hunters.

THE SECOND WAR

My second war in southeast Asia was as an advisor to a Vietnamese parachute unit. It was a strange experience. We fought intensely for a couple of days and then were free to swim and play tennis in Saigon. Most of the blood was being shed by the Vietnamese. We assisted by calling in air strikes, evacuating the injured, adjusting artillery, and making sure supplies were delivered.

We also experimented with new ideas. One of these was called Eagle Flight. The idea was to use a helicopter flying at low altitude to attract fire. As soon as the fire was received, the enemy position was radioed and troops in other helicopters would assault that position. We did this successfully for months; then the enemy learned our tactics and our casualties increased.

This was the start of the education of U.S. officers in the handling of large units. It was also my education on how to fight from the air. I made my two combat jumps that year. On the first, I was greeted by a strong wind that wouldn't allow me to collapse my chute. (We had no capewell releases in the parachutes of those days.) It was the monsoon season, and I kept skidding through the paddy fields and slamming into dikes. Some of the soldiers who were killed were knocked unconscious when they slammed into dikes and then drowned. We looked like we were water-skiing behind our parachutes.

This combat jump was costly in equipment as well. Trying to get out of my chute, I lost my weapon, binoculars, helmet, compass, and canteen. Several mortars, heavy machineguns, recoilless rifles, and radios were lost in the flooded paddies. It took us the better part of two hours to start moving toward the objective. The only paratrooper who was able to apprehend an enemy was the commander's cook. Landing on top of a sampan, he captured one enemy soldier on it and killed another.

I learned that isolated outposts need to feel that they will be reinforced if they will only hold out and fight until help arrives. Our policy was to reinforce any unit within 24 hours after it reported being attacked. A defender therefore knew that if he could hold out for 24 hours he would be reinforced.

We had units that slept under the wings of transport aircraft waiting for the word to go into combat. Parachute operations validated the importance of providing hope to units that were surrounded and alone. This second war emphasized air power. We could not get to our objective without the Air Force. And once there, we were usually outside the range of friendly artillery and had to rely on the Air Force for both cover and reconnaissance.

Vietnamese paratroopers made many combat parachute jumps. Their battle drills were simple and well executed. After a jump, we would always reorganize with Alpha Company to the north, Bravo to the east, Charlie to the south, and Delta to the west.

Even though I had had a previous combat tour, I learned a number of lessons from this second experience. Here are several that I shared with an interviewer on my return:

Perspective. The perspective of a

front line officer differs markedly from that of an officer who sits comfortably in an office and is not in harm's way.

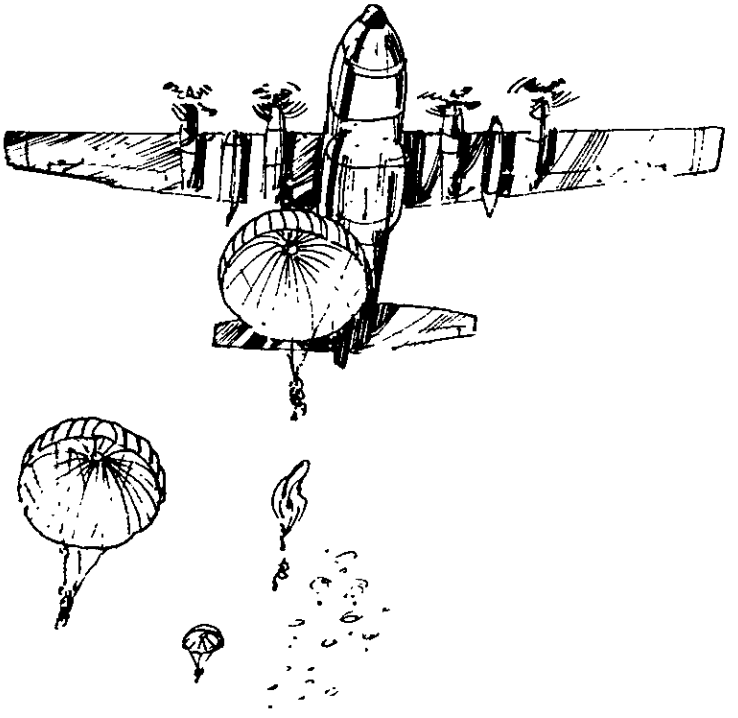
Never carry two weapons with different ammunition. I went into combat with a carbine (for firing at long range) and a .45 caliber pistol (for close range protection). One time, after we had been in a long firefight, I ran out of ammunition for my carbine and found the .45 useless for anything over 15 meters away. From then on, I carried a rifle and grenades.

Never wear anything white. On my first day, I was deposited on top of a hill by a helicopter that was under fire the last 400 meters into the area. I was rushed off to the battalion commander for a briefing.

The unit had been in the area for 15 days and had encountered enemy in almost every direction. It could be said that we were surrounded. The battalion was waiting for a Marine Corps unit to get within two or three kilometers before trying to push out from the hilltop. We would wait for it ten more days, all the while patrolling aggressively to keep the enemy from firing into our inner perimeter.

That first night, I was awakened when mortar rounds started coming in. I dropped out of my hammock into a shallow hole that was full of rain water. As the rounds continued, I decided to make a dash for the command post, which I knew had overhead cover. As I was running literally for my life, I felt small arms fire hitting close by. I jumped into the trench surrounding the CP and crawled inside. The battalion commander and the operations officer were calling for artillery. The commander looked up and said, "You were lucky you weren't killed with that white shirt. White makes a beautiful target at night for enemy snipers." I learned that the enemy would crawl close to the perimeter under the protection of their mortars and shoot at anything that moved.

I discarded all my white T-shirts and traded C-rations and a compass for Vietnamese shirts. (It wasn't until later on in the 1960s that the U.S. Army changed from white to olive drab T-shirts.)



Dig to protect yourself from incoming rounds. Those 10 days convinced me that the best protection against mortars and artillery was to be well dug in. Units that did not dig in suffered casualties when attacked by small arms and indirect fires. Our deep trenches saved us from the nightly shelling.

Learn the value of chickens and ducks. The Air Force dropped parachute boxes of live chickens and ducks, and we put them out on the perimeter for security. The ducks especially would alert us at the slightest movement in the perimeter. Vietnamese soldiers would often march with live chickens or ducks inside their backpacks, and the duck heads sticking out of a long row of packs made an interesting sight. As the food supply dwindled, we would cook the ducks and chickens. History tells us that the Romans also used geese to warn them of intruders, but many of us have forgotten this useful history lesson.

Even so, we fell into three ambushes during my tour with this parachute battalion. The one that lingers in my mind was the first. We had been trailing a Viet Cong patrol for more than an hour when we were attacked from the rear. The enemy patrol had simply doubled back, trailed us, and then attacked. We lost two men.

Learn how to use air support. The effectiveness of air support depended on the terrain. Although air support was very effective out in the open, in triple-canopy jungle, it was not.

Different weapons are needed for different terrain. Our parachute battalion was a general reserve unit that deployed wherever there was trouble. It was not uncommon for us to be fighting one week in the open spaces of the southern part of South Vietnam and the next week in triple-canopy jungle near the northern part.

Whenever we knew we were going into triple-canopy terrain, we jumped with Thompson submachine guns. When you can't see more than three to five meters in front of you, the Thompson is the best weapon to use in saturating an area with a heavy volume of fire. When we met the enemy in this type of vegetation we could not see him, but we could hear the whine of bullets coming in our direction. The best way to respond to such an attack is with a heavy volume of saturation fire. When we fought in areas where the visibility was better than 15 or 20 meters, we used the M1 rifle with its

long-range capability. The M1 fire was accurate and most of the time we fired single rounds.

Officers should learn to fly, if at all possible. During many of the air assaults that we conducted, it was not uncommon for me to be completely lost. Almost every time we went somewhere, the area was unfamiliar, a new area with different vegetation and terrain from the previous one. I would know basically where I was going from having studied a map, but the aircraft often circled in different directions and it was easy to lose my bearings. I swore that for the next war I would be better prepared to lead from the air, and decided to learn to fly. After that second war, while attending the Armed Forces Staff College at Norfolk, I would take off early afternoons and fly. Flying taught me radio-telephone procedures, weather, and how to navigate and orient myself in unfamiliar terrain. I also learned the capabilities and limitations of aircraft; in particular, I could now ask pilots to do things they had previously told me they could not do.

Flying also teaches several other valuable skills. One of these is using a radio. Most of the time during a battle soldiers will not see their commander but will hear his voice. A clear voice instills confidence, and pilots are experienced radio operators. The more you use the radio the more confident you sound. When you fly, you are constantly on the radio talking to a tower or to a radar controller asking for directions or the weather or requesting landing instructions.

A pilot also becomes a good navigator and a good weatherman. From the moment he takes off, he navigates in a very detailed manner because his life depends on his accuracy. Similarly, a pilot becomes an expert in forecasting and acquires great respect for the limitations of light aircraft in clouds and storms.

THE THIRD WAR

The third war was very different from the first two. We were now fighting with U.S. troops who were overwhelmingly draftees. The infantry battalion I commanded was more than 96 percent draftee. The majority proved to be excellent soldiers who fought well. Many, however, did not want to be in the Army, much less in Vietnam. A common statement at that time was, "Hell no, we won't go." In the United States, many were refusing to be drafted. In Vietnam, our units had a quota of the soldiers we could put in jail and no more. The jails were overflowing with soldiers who had refused to go into combat.

Fighting a war with draftees who were not interested in being in the Army or in Vietnam challenged our leadership abilities. Making it even more challenging, many of the professional NCOs who had been in Vietnam in the early 1960s were gone from the combat units. Many had been either wounded or killed or had transferred to less dangerous specialties. As a result, this last war was fought with many NCOs who were draftees themselves, but who were promoted in combat because of their leadership ability.

It was during this tour that I learned lots of lessons. I remember once being criticized for not being at my battalion command post. I managed to convince my brigade commander that the war was mainly a platoon leader's war and that a battalion commander needed to know personally the conditions that existed at platoon level.

I decided I would spend most of my time in the forward companies with my artillery fire support coordinator and a communicator. In Vietnam, we had battalions of four infantry companies each. One of those companies was almost always in combat, and I felt it necessary to be with that unit. In the evenings, I would join the night patrols. The first day I took over, I accompanied a patrol and was amazed at what I found. Noise discipline was poor with widespread snoring; each patrol had an excessive number of personnel; equipment was not tightly tied down; rehearsals were not conducted; claymores were badly located. In short, a disaster. The well-known statement that "the unit does well only what the commander checks" was proven that evening.

From then on I accompanied at least three night patrols a week. This forced lieutenants and company commanders to go on night patrols more frequently. The number of soldiers in a patrol was decreased to no more than 15. This put everyone on alert, as they knew this size force could not survive a surprise attack.

Another reason I went on these patrols was that the morale of the battalion was low. Officers were not exposing themselves to the same dangers the soldiers were, and those dangers were mainly encountered on night patrols. Without supervision, infractions were frequent and few were being corrected.

To reduce the deficiencies found in those patrols, we began requiring at least three rehearsals before granting a patrol permission to leave the base camp. The first was a talk-through with each man explaining on a sand table, or sketching on the ground, his position and actions in the patrol and on the objective. The second was a walk-through of the actions the patrol would take on the objective. The soldiers put out their claymores to make sure the wires were not tangled and the claymores were sighted in the right direction. They rehearsed their resupply and our battle drills. Then the third rehearsal was done at the quick time.

No matter how experienced we became, however, we always found during our rehearsals mistakes that needed correction. One reason for this was the constant flow of new troops into the companies — replacements for the wounded, killed, or those who had served six months in combat — and they had to be trained.

To correct the problems with snoring, we took the suggestion of a young soldier that all snorers put their gas masks on before sleeping. It worked.

Rain hitting our ponchos created another kind of noise, a metallic sound the enemy could hear. To solve this problem, we began using captured Viet Cong ponchos. These ponchos were made of soft plastic and did not make noise in the rain. It was ironic that the

best-equipped army in the world was discarding its rain gear and using the enemy's.

To prevent ambushes, we instituted what we called the zigzag requirement. Our rule was that we would not march longer than one hour in a straight line. After one hour we had to change our direction of march. Also, if we were in areas where we thought there might be many enemy soldiers, we would stop and stay as quiet as possible for two minutes or more so we could hear everything that was happening around us. We would frequently double back to see if anybody was following us, and on one occasion captured three Viet Cong soldiers who were trailing us.

The most effective weapon for us at the squad and platoon levels was the claymore. It was very good in the defense and gave us firepower over a wide area. It was also effective for breaking contact with a pursuing force. We found, though, that the claymore had to be demonstrated to convince the troops of the lethality of its rear blast. One of our night patrols illustrated this well. We had set up our defensive positions and settled down to wait. After two hours, one soldier noticed three Viet Cong soldiers passing through the field behind the claymore. He was reluctant to activate it because he didn't think the backblast would do anything more than scare them. Instead, the three enemy soldiers were engaged with small arm weapons, and two of them got away.

Later that day, we showed the patrol the effectiveness of the claymore. Its rear blast is deadly up to 16 meters. It will incapacitate anyone within that distance. Its front radius is 50 meters, and it is deadly when placed on trees and trails. We used it often to break contact with a reaction force bigger than ours. We slowed it down by setting up claymores behind us. As the enemy closed in, we activated the mines and forced the enemy soldiers to deploy and scout out the position before continuing their pursuit. This gave us enough time to move out of the area.

We discovered, too, that our resupply procedures were giving away the location of our patrols. We learned from captured documents and prisoners that the enemy placed people in the tops of trees so they could see where the helicopters were dropping supplies or where they were landing. The enemy then used this information to prepare ambushes.

One method of resupplying patrols that were sent out for long periods of time was the use of caches. We would hide supplies in certain areas, then come back with patrols and use those supplies. To deceive the enemy, our helicopters would drop dummy resupplies (old newspapers and empty boxes) at five or six areas, hoping to lure the enemy to those areas. The helicopters would loiter at the dummy areas but would drop supplies quickly at our true location.

One problem we had to solve was how to signal our position to the helicopter without using smoke. We devised a sturdy balloon that we would push through the canopy until it was flush with the top of the trees. It could not be seen from the horizon, but a helicopter flying overhead could easily spot the location.

We were fortunate to have an over-abundance of air assets. In fact, there was a standing order that if we came in contact with the enemy and did not call for air support within five minutes of that contact, we would have to explain in writing to our brigade commander why we had not.

Again, air support in triple-canopy was not effective. To use it, we needed 500 meters separation from the target. Artillery had to be shut off while air support was being used. In triple-canopy we normally made contact with the enemy no more than 5 to 20 meters away. We would then have to withdraw 500 meters, so the enemy soon learned how to survive air strikes. They had a tactic called "Hug the belts of the Americans." As we withdrew they advanced, because they knew that bombs were going to be dropped on them if they didn't.

Before the actual drop, we had to identify our front lines. We would use smoke grenades, but by the time the smoke went through the triple canopy, it did not show an accurate position. The smoke also would give our positions away to the enemy. We were literally carrying more smoke grenades than ammunition. We decided to substitute the front of an M79 shell with tightly rolled engineer tape and fired this shell through the tops of the trees. When the shell exploded, the tape unfurled and lay on top of the trees.

Armor also played a role in this war. Before this third combat tour, I had

been convinced that armor could not be used effectively in thick jungle, but I was wrong. By the end of the tour, I would have traded a company of soldiers for one armored vehicle.

In the jungle, a great majority of our casualties were caused by booby traps or by enemy fire from field fortifications that we could not see until we were on top of them. We sustained many casualties because of this. An APC or a tank moving through the jungle does something a soldier cannot do — it crushes the vegetation in front of it and explodes booby traps that could have killed or injured a man. These same booby traps do almost nothing to a tank. As the vehicle pushes through trees and vegetation, the debris also covers the firing ports of the enemy's pill boxes. This forces the enemy soldier to come out of his hole and engage the tank with an antitank weapon. At that point, our infantry can protect the tank by engaging the enemy soldier in the open. Light armor has an important role in jungle fighting.

On one occasion, we encountered gas, and it had a devastating effect on our unit, demoralizing a company in a very short time. We had been out in the jungle for almost 10 days when we saw a Viet Cong sniper who had just fired run into a hole. We followed him, and a volunteer went inside the hole with ropes around him so we could retrieve him. When we pulled him back to the surface, he collapsed. Our medics who gave him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation also collapsed. Within five minutes, we had four casualties around the hole.

We moved these soldiers away from the area and placed a shaped charge where we thought the cave was. When we exploded the charge, gas was released into the air from the hole. We yelled for everyone to mask. Four soldiers lost consciousness. Fear began to spread that the gas masks were not providing protection against this particular gas. As blisters began to appear on one soldier's skin, someone yelled, "mustard gas," and we had panic on our hands.

The fear of soldiers who have lost confidence in their gas masks is tremendous. This is a technique that can quickly bring panic into any unit. Iraq used this type of warfare to its advantage in its war with Iran.

After every operation we had a mandatory after action critique. The success of this activity depended largely on the leader. We found it beneficial for the leader to start it by criticizing his own actions. These after action critiques were invaluable in learning what had happened.

Since morale was a problem, a system of rewards became even more important than usual. To reward outstanding soldiers, we devised a "foxhole exchange program." It worked this way. A company commander would identify the best soldier in his unit and I would send him back to sleep in my tent while I replaced him in his squad. The exchange program was a great morale booster — all the soldiers wanted to sleep in my tent and eat hot meals in the rear area. It also enabled me to see personally what our soldiers were doing.

I remember one letter that was written by a soldier: "Dear Colonel, I thank you for letting me exchange places with you. The men also appreciate what you are doing. However, I still don't like the Army and I still don't like officers. As a matter of fact my favorite prayer goes this way: '0 Lord distribute bullets as you do the pay, let the officers get most of them.' Signed citizen Jenkins."

The chaplains were crucial to morale. I used them with our front line troops. I was criticized by a senior chaplain for exposing our battalion chaplain too often to combat. My answer was: He is where the men need him, where there are wounded and dying, and not back in the chapel in the rear where none of the soldiers who really need him can get to him. I went so far as to close the chapel to encourage the chaplain to spend most of his time walking with troops in difficult areas.

Finally, it didn't take us long to realize that our Congressmen back home were very interested in what we were doing in Vietnam. Many soldiers corresponded with their legislators. The rule in our unit was that we had to answer congressional mail within 24 hours after it was received, even when we were in combat. The usual query concerned such things as why wasn't a particular soldier getting a shower, or getting his mail on time?

My answer would always be the same: "Dear Congressman So-and-so. We very much appreciate the interest you have taken in our soldiers fighting for the security of the United States in Vietnam. We don't resupply our soldiers daily out in the field for fear that the helicopters will give away their positions. The same holds true to providing troops showers when they are out on patrol for five or more days. Rest assured that the commanders of our soldiers have their best interest at heart. Thank you for your interest. Respectfully yours."

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